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The Secret Team

Another View of the CIA

THE SWIRLING TORRENTS of Watergate have spilled over onto the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) which is lamentable for the nation but which may prove a boon for a retired Air Force colonel.

Since its inception in 1947, the CIA has been a vital element in our national defense. It has fulfilled tasks and duties which no other agency could possibly accomplish. It has had more than its share of critics and it has been assailed by well-meaning — if muddle headed — crusaders, as well as by those whose intentions may be suspect.

Despite criticism, attacks and charges of various sorts, the CIA must keep its lips firmly compressed and indicate no reaction.

"Because of the nature of its duties, required by law and by considerations of national security, the Central Intelligence Agency does not confirm or deny published reports, whether true or false, favorable or unfavorable to the agency or its personnel ...," a booklet on the CIA sets forth.

Moreover, the CIA is not allowed to move within the domestic realm. In a speech last year, Richard Helms, then the CIA director, spelled it out:

"... May I emphasize at this point that the statute specifically forbids the Central Intelligence Agency to have any police, subpoena, or law-enforcement powers, or any domestic security functions. I can assure you that except for normal responsibilities for protecting the physical security of our own personnel, our facilities, and our classified information, we do not have any such powers and functions; we have not sought any; we do not exercise any. In short, we do not target on American citizens. ..."

In view of the emerging CIA role in Watergate, that last sentence could have an ironic ring to it—and it grieves me to write this.

Coincidentally with the CIA being linked with Watergate, albeit in limited degree, a book has recently appeared which should benefit from the heightened interest in the intelligence agency. It is "The Secret Team, the CIA and its Allies in Control of the United States and the World." Its author is L. Fletcher Prouty, a retired

Air Force colonel. The publisher is Prentice-Hall, Inc.

My first reaction to the book was that Col. Prouty was either bitter and frustrated or merely after a fast buck or both. Having met him last week and had a long conversation with him, I am persuaded he is neither.

He is personable and he is convincing. I am confident his motives are beyond question. He spent nine years as the link between the CIA and the Air Force and he saw a great many activities which, in his own mind, he questions. I am not so sure that I am in total agreement with his conclusions, nor am I in agreement in any degree with some of the authorities he falls back on — notably Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and historian Arnold Toynbee.

But his book provides one view of the curious and complex world in which an intelligence agency operates.

Having spent nine years as an Air Force officer dealing daily with the CIA, he still has contacts, friends and associates within the agency. I asked him if he had had any reaction from the CIA regarding his book. He replied that he had received very favorable

reactions from individuals within the CIA — and he emphasized that they were speaking only as individuals.

Col. Prouty's main complaint, and this is the theme of the book, is against the "Secret Team" or "ST" which operates out of the "Dirty Tricks Department." These are the operatives who engage in clandestine operations such as fomenting a coup here or stirring up a revolution there — or so it seems.

It is his argument that these people have escalated their activities beyond the original purpose and scope of the CIA, and in doing so they are creating foreign policy for this nation rather than supporting the foreign policy evolved by the administration — any administration.

Whatever the virtue or fault of the ST, it is obvious that linking CIA with Watergate will generate new interest in Col. Prouty's book which was published a month or so ago.

The question which looms, of course, is whether linking CIA to Watergate will provide the means of emasculating an intelligence agency which is so essential to our national defense.